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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study to determine what management styles are being used at Czech schools and the possible reasons for these styles. The study also looked at participatory management in Czech schools and the possible hindrances to its wider adoption and development. Five basic questions were formulated: What management style is typically used? Are school leaders and teachers satisfied with the prevailing school management style? Is there an awareness of other management styles? Is there a need for participatory management style? and Has a participatory management style been realized in Czech basic schools? If "yes," what kind of decision making is made, to what extent are the decisions made in a participatory way, and what areas of these schools are affected? If "no," what are the main obstacles to participatory situations at schools? Questionnaire surveys, semistructured individual interviews, group interviews, observation, and study of documents were used. Findings indicate that a variety of management styles are being used, with the majority of school heads satisfied with the management style they have adopted. Another conclusion was that school leaders did not have much interest in getting teachers involved in shared-decision making. (DFR)

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Management of Czech Schools: with or without teachers' participation?

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Objectives

As the main objective of our research we proposed to find out what management styles are being predominantly used at the Czech basic schools and why it is so. Furthermore, we also wanted to find out what is the situation with the participatory management in Czech basic schools and what are possible hindrances for its wider adoption and development there.

Consequently, five basic questions were formulated and we were trying to find answers to them. The questions mentioned were as follows:

- What style of management is typically used at Czech basic schools?
- Is there a satisfaction with prevailing style of school management among school leaders and teachers?
- Is there an awareness of other management styles among school leaders and teachers? If so, what styles it concerns and how school leaders and teachers perceive them?
- Is there felt any need for participatory style of management at Czech basic schools?
- Is the idea of a participatory management realised in the practice of Czech basic schools' management? If yes, what kind of decision-making is made, in what extent are the decisions made in a participatory style, and what areas of these schools' functioning these styles concern? If no, what are the main hindrances to participatory situations at schools?

Methodology

Data for the analysis were gained with the use of both qualitative, and quantitative techniques of the data collection. We used two questionnaire surveys (respondents were heads of basic schools, and basic school teachers), semi-standardized individual interviews with basic school heads and their deputies, group interview with the teaching staff body at one basic school, participatory observation, study of the documents (structure charts of basic schools, school legislation, relevant literature, etc.).

The work has been realized in three phases:

1st phase

Heads of all basic schools in Brno (73) were approached and asked to fill the questionnaire "What is the management style at schools?" (return rate 58% , this is 42 questionnaires). Following step was the elimination of a number of respondents (through self-selection). The heads who returned filled questionnaire were asked to say if they want to collaborate in the survey further or not. Out of those willing to collaborate further (13) we have contacted only 9 (4 others were heads of incomplete basic schools - the ones not having groups of pupils at each of 9 age levels).[1]

2nd phase

Phase in which all teachers of 9 schools selected (a total of 331 teachers) were submitted a questionnaire for teachers and asked to fill and return it (all anonymously). The return rate amounted 52% (171 teachers). The return rate varied greatly among the schools involved (from 22% to 85%).

3rd phase

In this period we have only worked with those schools where the return rate amounted at least 70% (3 basic schools). For these schools we have worked out an analysis of the answers of their teachers and compared the results with the head's questionnaire. All the results were submitted to heads of these three schools. At all these schools we have used qualitative research techniques in this phase: individual and group interviews, study of the school documents, and participatory observation.

The questionnaires were constructed in the way that it was possible to compare answers of heads and the ones of teachers in most cases. Data collected from questionnaires were analysed with the SPSS-PC programme for statistical work out of the data in social science research.

Individual interviews were semistandardized, in two cases taped, in one recorded by handwritting, as the respondent did not allow any other way of recording. The essence of the group interview was recorded by means of the SWOT analysis technique done with the groups of one basic school teaching staff body (always groups of 4-6 people).

[1] Basic schools normaly serve to children of 6-15 years of age in Czech Republic

Main research findings

1. What style of management is typically used at the Czech basic schools?

We have found out that there can be identified a variety of management styles used at current Czech basic schools. These styles are used in schools in a context of still (at least partly) alive directivism and centralism of the Czech school system.

Within the schools there are very clearly differentiated powers and responsibilities of school leaders (heads) and the ones of "others" (teachers and other people working in schools). Heads' powers and responsibilities are very high. Consequently, the vertical line relations are strengthened, sometimes they even dominate in the school structure (leading to a culture of subordination). As a result, the decision making process involves most typically teachers at the level of consultations with heads who have their final say and who also carry the formal responsibility for the decisions taken. This concerns both operational decisions and (even more strongly and perhaps surprisingly) strategic ones.

Such a state of art does not seem to be satisfactory for heads themselves. They quite often express their wish for higher involvement of their staff in the decision making and management of whole-school issues. Heads also quite frequently claim they would rather like to adopt more "participatory" way of managing the school. At the same time they believe, however, their current management style is a realistic one ("it reflects the reality of school's inner life"). It seems, heads often lack instruments for more effective stimulation of higher involvement of the staff (heads' qualification background does not seem to be adequate for their positions in many cases, they lack a systematic preparation). It is not an exception that "learning by doing" is a predominant way of heads' professional development, as current offer and other support from the outside do not seem to be satisfactory.

On the other hand, a majority of teachers does not seem to be dissatisfied with the present situation as described above. The essence of their job remains in the classroom and in their teaching work. Reality and ideal of school management is quite near in the eyes of many teachers. This way, heads' highly dominant role at the decision making process is often confirmed and justified by teachers. There is not too much willingness among teachers to get involved in issues beyond the classroom level. Most successful participative practices involving teachers come out of teachers' work in classroom and with pupils and are built on this teachers' activity. This seems to be a viable basis for most of the efforts to involve teachers into the activities beyond the classroom level. The lack of consensus in what kind of

involvement should be expected from teachers is evident, too, within the whole school system.

If we use the model of management styles by Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973) where autocratic (say), paternalistic (sell), consultative (involve) and democratic (co-determinate) styles are distinguished, we could generally say that Czech basic schools are predominantly managed in ways close to paternalistic, and consultative styles. Autocracy as well as democratic style of management seem to be rather exceptional at current Czech basic schools.

2. Is there a satisfaction with prevailing style of school management among school leaders and teachers?

Majority of heads (64%) seems to be rather satisfied with the management style they adopted, although some of them are aware of its weak points at the same time (these weaknesses often lead to lower level of teachers involvement in decisions about school-level management issues). At the same time, 42% heads would welcome higher involvement of teachers in the school management and decision making. Only a minority of heads (36%) considers a change of their current management style. They point at many hindrances of such a change, though. These hindrances are related to teachers, heads themselves, and also to external circumstances of the schools' operation. Among the most often stated ones there have appeared: lack of teachers' independence, their low level of responsibility and perseverance, considerations to "older" and "merited" teachers, habits and norms introduced by previous heads, lack of time, lack of finances, overload caused by huge maintenance tasks, self-conservatism, and a general busyness of heads.

In their majority, teachers seem to be more satisfied than heads with ways of managing schools they work in. Most of them (62%) considered their heads to be participative leaders, and another 35% said their heads are at least sometimes behaving participatively. Heads viewed themselves in a similar way in this issue (76% believe they are participative leaders, another 24% claimed they sometimes behave this way). At this item we used the definition offered by Lunenburg and Ornstein (1991:143): "A participative leader consults with subordinates concerning work-related matters, solicits their opinions, and frequently attempts to use subordinates' ideas in making decisions".

Relative satisfaction of majority of teachers and lower level of heads' satisfaction with ways school are managed can also be related to changes within teachers' and heads' functions and consequent new demands put on them. While heads' functions have dramatically been

changed and demands seem to be very high and complex (in sense of managing all the issues connected with the whole school-site operation), the very essence and content of teachers' work have not been changed much, in fact. Teachers were mostly freed for their rather independent work within the classrooms. There is often hardly any pressure put on them to get involved in something beyond this level. This is possibly why many teachers (especially the ones with more years of teaching experience) expressed higher level of their satisfaction, despite to newly emerging problems (such as discipline of pupils and coping with it, etc.).

Generally, it can be said there prevails a satisfaction with existing ways of school management (a bit more in case of teachers than the heads). This should be added, however, that some respondents' satisfaction may have arosen out of their comparisons with the era before 1989 when reasons not to be satisfied were present for a number of people. Consequently, it does not have to mean that current state of art is really a satisfactory one (from "more objective" point of view).

3. Is there an awareness of other management styles among school leaders and teachers? If so, what styles it concerns and how school leaders and teachers perceived them?

This question has been formulated with regard to the logic of the procedure. If at least a part of heads consider a change of ways they manage schools, what styles are they aware of and possibly interested in to adopt? Part of the heads (36%) confirmed they consider a change of their management style, and part of those who do not consider a change (64%) claimed they have already changed the way of their work a lot in recent past. This all indicates an awareness of different ways of school management among a considerable number of heads. Yet the picture of management styles is hardly a complete one. The heads' handicap of a lack of their formal education and training for their function has already been mentioned. As a result, heads have been left without a sufficient chance to rely on systematic and adequate management training programs in many cases.

The situation of teachers is even more troubled in this respect, as a vast majority of their education and training opportunities does not go beyond the methodical issues and the very content issues of their teaching subjects. Authors of education and training schemes seem to believe that organisational issues are not an adequate offer for teachers.

People in schools do not live in a vacuum and they are aware of the existence of other management styles. In many cases they also remember times before 1989 and ways schools were managed. Yet the professional and systematic support from the outside would be highly

needed for them, particularly with regard to the fact that quite a few heads admit they are not able to stimulate effectively teachers for their higher involvement, and also with regard to a considerable number of heads' positive attitude towards possible changes of their management style.

4. Is there felt any need for participatory style of management at schools?

Heads cannot see much interest at their teachers' side to get involved in shared decision making. They point out their teachers' low initiative, unwillingness to take responsibility, and low level of their activity as well as negative role of some still surviving old-time stereotypes. Only 22% of heads say they can see high teachers' interest in participation at the decision making about the whole-school level issues. Most of others (62%) said teachers' interest is only occasional and usually not very high.

Teachers confirmed that their heads make a lot of effort (39%) or at least some effort (one third) to involve teachers more in decisions about some whole-school issues. Teachers' own interest in such an involvement varies greatly, the highest one seems to be in issues related directly to their work in classrooms. Sometimes their interest is higher than the real chance to get involved, claim teachers.

Both groups, however, highly value participatory management as a concept (in their rhetoric). They agree it is a very effective instrument of school improvement (65% of teachers, 71% of heads), a condition of a long-term quality work of people in school (64% of teachers, 71% of heads), a way leading to higher level of people's motivation in their work (67% of teachers, 67% of heads), and (in some extent) - consequently - a tool leading to higher productivity of people (47% of teachers, 31% of heads). Almost no respondents agree with negative statements concerning the participatory management.

There seems to be evident at least a partial discrepancy between rhetoric and practice in the case of both groups. Lower level of their readiness to support a practice of participatory management (or at least to express their dissatisfaction with situations being rather far from participation opportunities) can be related to historical, structural, formal as well as subjective circumstances. They concern not only people working directly in schools but also the millieu of the whole school system and society. Among the **historical** reasons the role of tradition of

centralism, directivism, and bureaucracy could especially be pointed out. As for the **structural** reasons, the organisation of working processes in a traditional school, design of heads' and teachers' jobs, of a work day, week, and other periods of time as well as the organisation of external support not stimulating effectively shared work of heads and teachers could be mentioned. Among **formal** reasons sharply split rights and responsibilities between heads and teachers, a narrow understanding of a composition of school management teams, and some other ones could be found. Finally, unwillingness to do more, to enter unknown and insecure area of collaboration, inability to be effective in such a new millieu, underestimation of its needs, and many more reasons of rather a **subjective** nature could be related to many actors of the school system, too.

5. Is the idea of a participatory management realised in the practice of Czech basic schools' management? If yes, what kind of decision-making is made, in what extent are the decisions made in a participatory style, and what areas of these schools' functioning these styles concern? If no, what are the main hindrances to participatory situations at schools?

In order to answer these questions, we have divided possible teachers' participation into four areas of school operation.

The highest teachers' involvement can be found in **issues directly concerning the process of education and schooling**: the selection of textbooks and other materials (89% teachers participate, 93% say they wish to take part), selection of adequate teaching methods and procedures (89%; 91%), solving study problems of individual pupils (92%; 94%), and provisions for meeting special education needs of pupils (59%; 73%). Still, there is slightly higher interest among teachers to take part than they have a chance to be involved in these issues which directly concern their work with pupils, indicate teachers' responses.

Considerably lower was teachers' involvement in **the development of whole-school strategies**. While in setting up the school strategies for education and schooling was teachers' involvement still quite high (61% involved; 83% expressed they wish to be involved), and similar situation was found in case of teachers' involvement in formulating principles and guidelines pupils' discipline in classrooms (82%; 96%), in case of planning of school material resources development teachers' participation already decreased (48%; 85%), and

finally, only 5% of teachers take part in planning of school budget (while 38% would be interested in such an activity).

Quite a similar situation can be seen in case of teachers' participation at **the development of school external relations**: setting up principles of communication with parents (58% teachers claim to be involved, 80% interested in such an involvement), development of relations with other external subjects of schools (13%; 29%), representation of school in the outer world (73%; 80%), and organising programs of pupils' extramural activity (46%; 55%).

Far the lowest teachers' participation was found in **personnel** issues: hiring new staff members (13% teachers take part, 35% would like to), division of work to staff (18%; 39%), solving the complaints of individual teachers (14%; 37%), setting the amount of individual teachers' salaries (4%; 19%), disciplinary actions against teachers failing to meet their duties (7%; 19%).

Generally, only 5% of respondents-teachers claim they take part in the decisions belonging to all the four areas stated. 12% of others claim, on the other hand, they do not take part at any decision making process related to the areas described. If we look at results, the picture of a teacher as a person taking primarily care for the classroom and pupils emerges quite clearly.

Discussion

Unlike the previous set of questions, the other parts of the questionnaires as well as data collected by means of other techniques indicate lower level of teachers' involvement, though. Both in case of operational, and (even more strongly) in case of strategic decisions there seem to be highly neglected not only "shop floor" teachers and other school employees, but also "middle managers" of the school. It is worrying, as particularly middle managers (leaders of groups of the same subject teachers) could play a vital role in development more suitable millieu for communication and co-operation within the school, between top and bottom levels. It has also been shown that there is a lack of effective forms of working with people in schools - the ones by which school leaders would stimulate their higher participation. Either the heads are not aware of them, or they do not know how to implement these forms and make use of them.

Generally, it seems there are most often adopted ways of management which are close to the paternalistic, and to consultative style (see Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1991). While

working with respondents, we have used the participatory management definition offered by Lunenburg and Ornstein (1991:30): "Participatory management stresses the importance of motivating employees and building an organisation for that purpose. The organisation is structured to satisfy employees' needs, which will in turn result in high worker productivity". With regard to it and also taking into account specifics of the Czech reality, we would rather formulate participatory situation, as understood by most of respondents and actors of the system, in following features:

1. Teachers participate at the decision making about the whole-school issues, especially in the field of educational issues; lower level of their participation can be found at other issues more directly related to their work with pupils in classrooms.
2. Operational and strategic issues are rather sharply split; an extent of people's participation depends on their position in formal structure of the school (the higher position, the more participation).
3. There do exist certain standardised formal situations (opportunities) in which people working in school can effectively express their views and eventually participate at the decision making process.
4. In a school managed participatively the management team consists of a higher number of people, not only of the head and his/her deputies.

If to sum up previously stated results, we can conclude that most often there can hardly be a say about clearly prevailing participatory styles of management in Czech basic schools. We can see there are many subjective as well as objective hindrances to the development of more effective ways of management and decision making process. At the same time, however, there are also many schools, headmasters and teachers who try hard (although not always successfully) to move things ahead - towards shared work on the school-site management development.

It seems there is not much experience and development in the respect of participatory management at Czech schools. Our research findings hopefully helped to point at some of the main phenomena within the issue. More research activity would still be needed, however, to get a rather complete picture of what are the possibilities to support participation in Czech schools and school system. Results of the research should become a basis for the development of specific mechanisms (education, consulting, legislation, etc.) promoting introduction of participatory management styles into Czech schools and school system.

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